

Buckley's Places

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Once upon a time I spoke on the phone with a philosophical friend whom I had not seen for a while. I asked him how he was, and after a pause he replied, 'I'm OK, but I don't like the place much.' 'What place?' I asked, to which he said, after another pause, 'The world'.

Is the world a place? It is not a place in the sense that Parkville is a place, or, say, Costa Rica is. And it is not the ensemble of places, either—all the places that are the case. It is at once stranger and more immediate than any particular place, and yet it lends its character to each of them. The world is a condition of things: but so in a particular way is every place, and that for a double reason. In part it is because we deem this to be so, and in part because it is the kind of place that prompts such deeming. When, in *Moby Dick*, Herman Melville says of Queequeg's South Pacific island home Kokovoko that it is 'not down on any map; true places never are,' he is offering a riff on the notion that even the places that make us are partly of our own making.

One of Vincent Buckley's books is called *The World's Flesh*, another *Masters in Israel*, another *Arcady and Other Places*, another *Memory Ireland*: it suggests that places were, to put it mildly, on his mind. I propose to see some of the ways in which this is so, and I shall begin with the revealingly-titled 'Ghosts, Places, Stories, Questions':

Ghosts, places, stories, questions:
the new life I demand of my bones.
Lights and darknesses about the hardening
mind. Beneath such questioning
I cling to the notion of the paradigm:
Troilus keeps his pale eyes even in the bronze-green
thickets of summer 1965.
There are myths living
even in our way of walking.
I sometimes think they look at me in the street,
'there's the man who came back from hell
with no Beatrice, and no hope of heaven';
or, with a touch of scholarship,
'*quantum mutatus ab illo*.
discourteous, abrupt, with staring eyes,
hardly the same man.'
Myths, certainly, but also
matters of sheer observation.
Life is a history of absences
and unprepared returns. Arcadia
cannot darken the shallow eyes.

And what was it at Thermopylae,
each watching his neighbour's bones
dissembling the death they had to pass through,

the Spartans thought, before they took their spears
 and pressed their bodies to the brief defile?
 The combing of hair soothed their hands,
 but what rested their spirits, the three hundred
 'picked men, of middle years, with living sons'
 who oiled their bodies for battle as for the games?
 There was surely
 a revelation in those bodies, and the wind
 carried their whispering to the watching hills
 as the Persians came forward on their dead.

Where is the pride in losing
 so predictably and so completely?
 These have no relevance for me. Why then
 do I think of them whenever
 I tune my muscles for the strait of death?

Yes, and ghosts: how close to the marrow
 can they come? At night I feel them
 like drops of sweat running under the skin,
 chill with myth; till I half expect my friends
 ('and at his coming the hair of their heads stood up')
 to cry out, What is that inside you
 that makes our shadow flicker on the grass?
 Heatless and demanding presences,
 I will endure you; but you shall not be my gods
 Arcadia cannot give you flesh; heaven
 cannot make you more than spies of hell.

And what friends are they who, sweat-mastered
 at the thunder-fanned and burning bush,
 will walk more cautiously, saying, Oh, that
 is the God you belong to; that the woman.
 Oh, that. When the bush burns to ashes
 I still must touch my forehead to the ground,
 because its radiance is in my body.
 Gods are vulgar. So are journeys.
 Ulysses sails to find a speck of blood
 in the newly woven pattern; Orpheus
 goes down to find mortality a blessing.
 I walk beside these fires because I must,
 in pain and trembling sometimes thanking God
 for what they give me, the few poems
 that are the holy spaces of my life. (*Collected* 123-125)

It used to be the case—may still be, for all I know—that telephone conversations in China began not with the question, 'Who is this?', but with, 'Where are you?', meaning, 'where do you fit into the scheme of things?' It might be said that in Buckley's poetry that is the salient question, provided it is added that 'how the scheme of things fits with me' is correspondingly important. Another philosophical friend of mine observed, not altogether seriously, that when

you are lost the question to ask is not where you are—you know where you are—but where everything else is. This might be called one of Buckley's *koans*.

'Ghosts, Places, Stories, Questions': the title may be merely pragmatic, but it may also be dynamic, in the sense that the words may play or pull upon one another, their joint intent being something like: 'The stories alluded to emerge from places whose inhabiting ghosts prompt questions in me.' To put it more palpably, there are two references in this poem to bones, and two to sweat, one an image of stability and the other an image of mobility. As a matter of fact there are a lot of bones in the *Collected Poems*, and there is a lot of sweat, and with due allowance for distinctive effects in one place or another, I think that in general, as in this poem, they might remind us of deals being done, intellectually and imaginatively, between the stable and the mobile in Buckley's poems. 'Ghosts, Places, Stories, Questions' operates partly through fusions, a strategy which always, incidentally, demands an outflanking of confusions.

Consider if you will some of those fusions. 'I cling to the notion of the paradigm,' the poem says (123), before introducing a number of paradigmatic figures who are to inhabit it for most of its course. 'Troilus keeps his pale eyes even in the bronze-green / thickets of summer 1965' (123). In Greek and then Latin myth, the young Trojan prince Troilus is first ambushed by Achilles, then murdered and mutilated by him. He was regarded as the epitome of a dead child mourned by his parents, and he was also thought of as a paragon of youthful male beauty. On July 28, 1965, the American president Lyndon B. Johnson announced that he was committing a further 50,000 troops to the war in Vietnam, saying as he did so, 'I do not find it easy to send the flower of our youth, our finest young men, into battle.' (He was probably unaware when he said this that, in classical writing, the death of young men, specifically, was associated with the cutting or withering of flowers—hence, eventually, both 'The Flowers of the Forest' and 'Where Have All the Flowers Gone?').

'There are myths living / even in our way of walking' (123). The poem's claim will be viable, of course, only on condition that the mythic is not, in principle, eschewed by the reader or hearer. Such an austerity had been voiced by some, both poets and critics. But Buckley worked on the assumption that his poem could be a place where the mythic and the historical could meet on equal terms—that it could be 'common ground.' In so doing, he was acting in the spirit of (for instance) countless Renaissance artists who, though clear in their own minds as to which of the figures inhabiting their paintings were mythic and which historical, still found each of those paintings a terrain of encounter between the two ways of addressing reality.

An advantage of entertaining more than one perspective—as in, 'There are myths living/even in our way of walking'—is that the familiar is, to a degree, estranged. When, in 'The Statues,' Yeats asks: 'When Pearse summoned Cuchulain to his side, / What stalked through the Post Office?' (375), that word 'stalked' is doubly appropriate, hinting as it does both at striding and at hunting—here, a hunting-out of historic significance under the aegis of mythic heroism. Buckley, pleased by much in Yeats, was sceptical of the mage's *hauteur*, but sympathetic to his taste for polyvalence, his gift of the wondering eye. The later poet's idiom could be notably clipped, as in

Myths, certainly, but also
matters of sheer observation.
Life is a history of absences
and unprepared returns. Arcadia

cannot darken the shallow eyes ('Ghosts, Places, Stories, Questions,' *Collected* 123)

but the two poets are at one in their sense that a poem is to be a place of justified wondering.

Idiomatically, we ask, 'What's the story on so-and-so?', the question inviting both a narrative and an insight. 'Ghosts, Places, Stories, Questions' is laced through with allusions to momentous stories, from which stories the poem seeks to distil insights for Buckley's story. The practice is deeply traditional. One might, for example, think of the many redactions of an original tale traced in W.B. Stanford's *The Ulysses Theme* and continued in Derek Walcott's *Omeros* with the Caribbean in mind or in Michael Longley's Odyssean poems with the North of Ireland in mind. Something of that order is at issue in the lines, "'there's the man who came back from hell / with no Beatrice, and no hope of heaven'" (123). Happily, from my point of view, translations into English of some or all of the *Divine Comedy* abound, in part as I take it because a significant number of people find that so-foreign a work eerily telling about their own condition. Shelley wrote of the poet's business, 'We want the creative faculty to imagine that which we know' (qtd in Reiman 502), and there is no telling who may become our familiars in that affair.

'Life is a history of absences / and unprepared returns' (123): Dante's work might itself be a paradigm for the proposition. The subtext of the whole of the *Commedia* is the poet's exilic absence from Florence, and the poem is full of figures who return to its pilgrim, whether from his own past or from the past of the culture which he embodies, in ways for which he could never have prepared himself, but which he cannot ignore. The *Divine Comedy*'s matching of a singular music with singular abruptions is one of the most striking things about it, and as I take it Buckley's poem, which itself aspires to a kind of perfected eloquence, has an investment in conceded abruptions, conceded privations.

Like it or not, the *Commedia* is largely about the dead-and-alive, whether one thinks of the condition of those in each of that work's three realms, or one thinks of the perduring of its figures as exemplars or as luminaries: it is, so far as Dante is concerned, the transmutation of history into myth, this being not a deprivation but an enhancement. In 'Ghosts, Places, Stories, Questions', the encounter at Thermopylae is visited as myth, but it is also to a degree historicised, given a flesh of its own.

It is part of the legend that when the massive Persian array sent an envoy to demand the surrender of the Spartan arms, he received from Leonidas the terse reply, 'Come and get them', and it is also part that the Spartans were accustomed to comb their long hair when about to risk their lives. But when Buckley asks

And what was it at Thermopylae,
each watching his neighbour's bones
dissembling the death they had to pass through,
the Spartans thought (123)

this has an idiolectal distinctiveness—as in the coupling of those bones with that dissembling—a distinctiveness which animates it as though it were veridical. Talking back, as it were, to the Spartan ghosts, he claims that 'These have no relevance for me,' but he still asks

... Why then
do I think of them whenever
I tune my muscles for the strait of death? (124)

Part of the answer is presumably that, whatever of pride and whatever of loss, courage is exemplary. But another part of the answer is that Buckley's very way of characterising the figures he contemplates takes them, so to speak, into his own being. Owning the ways in which they are themselves, he also comes to own them after his own fashion.

I want to say some more about Buckley's story-ing in this poem, but I pause here to make a point of some importance for the apprehension of his poetry in general. It is this. *On the one hand* the poetry welcomes, positively relishes, the physically elemental: it gives a home again and again to those archaic elements, earth, air, fire and water, or their surrogates—something which is frequent in the poems, early and late. So we have the bronze-green thickets, the wind-borne whispering, the burning bush, the sweat and the blood. The instinct to recapitulate and to render 'the world's flesh' in such terms is persistent. To the question, 'what or where is Buckley's place?', one answer is, 'His place is the poem in which the world is sometimes interrogated, sometimes revised, sometimes celebrated, but at all events *presented*.'

On the other hand (and the disjunction is not a perfect one), the answer to that question might equally be, 'His place is his body.' The phenomenological dictum 'I am my body in the world' might have been made for Buckley, though of course it does not follow from this that one *is* thus easily, nor that talk of spirit is ill-conceived, nor that one's transactions with the world are without mystery.

Both of these considerations—of the poem as the world's place, and of the body as the self's place—are relevant when one considers the last phases of 'Ghosts, Places, Stories, Questions.' The poem's first word is 'Ghosts,' and it is entirely a haunted poem: at the same time, it is entirely a grounded poem, grounded in the corporeal. The eyes, the hair, the marrow, the muscles, the forehead—these are not incidentals, but are the vectors of the poem's preoccupations, as of its sensibility. John Berger has said that 'Poetry can repair no loss, but it defies the space which separates. And it does this by its continual labour of reassembling what has been scattered' (O'Driscoll, *Bloodaxe* 23). Patently, something of the sort is taking place when Buckley concerts *Job* with *Exodus*, Ulysses with Orpheus, Arcadia with heaven and hell.

The effect—and this is true of the whole poem—is strobe-like: Berger's 'reassembling what has been scattered' takes place in flashes rather than in a steady glow. Physically, we see via saccades, that is, rapid leaps of the eye within a broadly-scanned scene, and this is a poem which in effect emulates just such movement. It is, so to speak, at once hospitable to a range of givens, and pressed to scrutinise them; the questioning is as important as the haunting. 'If prose is a river,' Michael Longley wrote, 'poetry is a fountain' (O'Driscoll, *Bloodaxe* 116), and Seamus Heaney refers to 'poetry's impulse to outstrip the given' (qtd in O'Driscoll, *Bloodaxe* 327)—sentiments, both, with which Buckley would agree, and which are pertinent to this poem. But, as his poetry increasingly displays, the fountaining and the outstripping have customarily to be checked if they are to retain their credibility, not to speak of their authority. Hence the questions which lace this poem and a number of those to follow it.

I do not imagine that, when Anne Carson wrote, 'I don't simply want to tell what is. I want to tell what is with all the radiations around it of what could be' (O'Driscoll, *Bloodaxe* 62), she was thinking of the conclusion of 'Ghosts, Places, Stories, Questions,' though in principle she might have been. 'When the bush burns to ashes / I still must touch my forehead to the ground, / because its radiance is in my body' (124), and '...the few poems / that are the holy spaces of my life' (125)—these lines do indeed bid on behalf of 'all the radiations...of what could be,' but they are, so to speak, deeply weathered as well. In *Poetry and the Sacred*

(1968), Buckley quotes a passage from Mircea Eliade's *The Sacred and the Profane* to this effect:

There are...privileged places, qualitatively different from all others – a man's birthplace, or the scenes of his first love, or certain places in the first foreign city he visited in youth. Even for the most frankly non-religious man, all these places still retain an exceptional, a unique quality; they are the 'holy places' of his private universe, as if it were in such spots that he had received the revelation of a reality *other* than that in which he participates through his ordinary daily life. (74)

Commenting on the passage, Buckley asks, among other questions, whether such 'holy places' 'help to seal up a private universe or whether, on the contrary, they open it up to a wider world of meaning' (*Poetry* 75)—itself a question pertinent not only to the one poem but to many another of his. What does seem clear to me, in any case, is that the instinct to identify *the poems themselves* as holy places or holy spaces ran as deeply in him as anything else, first to last. They had, as it were, a proleptic radiance; were there for the seeking when they were still ghostly, still questions.

I am fond of the notion of what I call 'zones of the imagination.' By this I mean something other than that there are many places—most places in fact—to which we have not gone but which we imagine for ourselves—like, say, Patagonia on the one hand or Alice's Wonderland on the other. I am thinking of the fact that distinctively-written places inhabit, so to speak, different territories of the mind, and look for different pitchings or keyings of the attention. They have their own idioms, practice their own rhetorics. Thomas More's *Utopia* and Samuel Butler's *Erewhon*, Jonathan Swift's land of the Houyhnhnms and George Orwell's *Animal Farm* are equally fictitious, but one needs a different kind of mental visa to go to each of them, and a different kind of mental negotiation to lodge there for a while as a resident alien.

Famously, L.P. Hartley's *The Go-Between* begins with the sentence, 'The past is a foreign country: they do things differently there'. They do things differently, too, in different zones of the imagination. And in fact, any literary criticism or interpretation or theory worth its salt requires an ability to hear the idiolect proper to each inhabitant of each such zone—a fact abundantly demonstrated in the many failures to do so. 'Writing poetry well is only occasionally difficult,' said Randall Jarrell; 'usually it is impossible.' One might, for 'poetry,' substitute other words.

This being so, it is rash enough to hope to speak effectively of Buckley's handling place in prose: but as he himself said once, 'bravely fighting off attacks of false modesty,' I shall try to do so. In *Memory Ireland: Insights into the contemporary Irish condition* (1985), he writes:

In Listowel, where the annual writers week is rightly esteemed the pride of County Kerry, our reading in 1982 was due to start about eleven at night. The tiny theatre would not be free until then. So [Paul] Muldoon and I read then, starting even later. The audience was understandably tiny; but Muldoon was, it seemed, gravely put out before he saw it. He is a man who looks even younger than his age, dresses stylishly, with a touch of the world snooker player about his use of the weskit, and walks and stands in a leaning, self-effacing manner, as if to emphasize the passive, wounded nature of his self in the world. He is also highly intelligent, with a mind that is combative rather

than otherwise, which lies curled like a snake's head waiting to be stirred into strike. As Gabriel FitzMaurice ushered me into the hotel where I was to stay the night, and I walked into the centre, not of paralysis but of a roar like a cattle-sale, the first person I saw was Paul. He was seated, with the artist Mary Farl Powers, on the bottom step of the central stairway; they were forlornly drinking gin and tonic. About them swayed dozen upon dozen of Munstermen and women, and some Munsterkids, drinking and talking and roaring. There were snatches of songs of differing kinds. Every bar was full, every lounge, the television room, and the foyer. People passed for no apparent reason from one space to another, adding to the congestion. There was an air of much affluence combined with little poshness. Gracefulness was not insisted on. As soon as he saw us, Muldoon rose with an expression of great relief and offered drinks. (203-4)

Earlier, in *Cutting Green Hay*, Buckley had written of his school, St Patrick's College, East Melbourne, under the title, 'A Small Proud Unimportant Place,' a title which suggests at once both complexity and a suffusing of place with personality, if not 'personalities.' The suggestion is borne out in that chapter, and indeed throughout much of that book. The 'place' in that case proves to be a *theatrum mundi* in little; a locale of rehearsal and small-scale enactment of what is to be done in the human world at large. It is a place where figures are cut, interplays studied, and 'types' established. Like much of *Cutting Green Hay*, it looks thoughtfully at sophisticated versions of beings from the ancient and the more modern 'character' tradition, a tradition in which animus, when present, operates reductively, but in which engrossment may instead flesh out individuals all the more for their element of typicality's being highlighted. And we have something of the kind in this passage.

It begins by lodging affairs in time (later than 11:00 pm, in 1982) and in place (Listowel, County Kerry), with the 'tiny theatre' conveniently alerting the reader to what may be about to come. The Paul Muldoon who is introduced early in the piece is quickly established as a 'principal,' and also as a performer, the one who 'dresses stylishly, with a touch of the world snooker player about his use of the weskit,' as if the weskit were as deployable as the suppositious snooker cue. Within half a sentence, Muldoon is seen as a self-deployer, someone to watch. And within the other half of the sentence, this is not cancelled but complicated, in Muldoon's walking and standing 'in a leaning, self-effacing manner, as if to emphasize the passive, wounded nature of his self in the world.'

Often, in conversation, Buckley would imply that things were more complex than his interlocutor had supposed, and would give instances to support the claim; that habit of mind shows itself in a passage like the present one. Muldoon, it is clear, is not to be wrapped up in any easy fashion. That estimation is fortified in the next sentence, 'He is also highly intelligent, with a mind that is combative rather than otherwise, which lies curled like a snake's head waiting to be stirred into strike', where the last half-dozen words both imply the strategist and evoke the snooker-player again. As a young man being interviewed for an editorial role, and being asked whether he would make space for both sides of a case, Buckley answered, 'No,' and when the surprised questioner asked why not, he replied that there might be more than two sides involved. There were often more than two evident elements involved when it came to his characterisation of people.

My theme is 'Buckley's Places,' and to the recurring question, 'What are his places?' another answer is, 'the places are where the people are.' It is true that often, especially in the poetry, Buckley appears as a singleton, a solitaire—glad, sad, or conflicted and searching. But it is also true that, imaginatively speaking, he likes peopled milieux—peopled rather than simply

populated, if I may make the distinction. It is important to him that the latent distinctiveness of each one be made allowance for, even in the midst of generalisation. And so in the present passage, of the thronged hotel where 'There were snatches of songs of differing kinds. Every bar was full, every lounge, the television room, and the foyer', two distinctions are offered: 'There was an air of much affluence combined with little poshness', and 'Gracefulness was not insisted on', where the first suggests an expertise as well as a state of affairs, and the second is piece of genial ironic understatement. None of the dozens of Munstermen and women and Munsterkids is named, but they, too, are not to be wrapped up too easily.

Buckley could not know that the same Mary Farl Powers would die in middle age, nor that Paul Muldoon would write an elegy, 'Incantata' (Muldoon 13), for her which is marked at every point by panache, but also by what Buckley calls 'the passive, wounded nature of [Muldoon's] self in the world'. Off that stage in Listowel, the world's theatre still has to be addressed—sometimes, at best, appeased. And I do not know whether Buckley ever made anything of what is known as Ireland's 'Dindsenchas' texts, a body of writings in early Irish literature which recount the origins of place-names, and traditions about events and characters associated with the places in question. These, on one account, are 'far from an accurate history of how places came to be named': but the spirit of the thing is I believe one which is partly native to Buckley, in that for him any *genius loci* is going to involve the personal as well as the natural. It was said of a university administrator of my acquaintance that for him 'the ears are purely ornamental': for Buckley, attending to place was, by contrast, very much a matter of hearing voices.

Some years ago, at short notice, I went to a meeting in Rome. The meeting over, I cast around in a bookshop for something sizeable to read on the way back to Melbourne, and found Italian bilingual editions of both *Paradise Lost* and Seamus Heaney's *The Haw Lantern*. I am approximately a monoglot, but as the plane swung over the Alps and beyond, I hobbled my way through some of both books. It dawned on me then, in that exotic locale, how evocative a thing translation can be. Translation of poetry, say, is a rendition on other terms of an original, but it is also a kind of metaphor for the original—there is a link between the two, but it is a spring-like link, with both versions declining to be clasped together. There are between them invisible but indestructible Alps.

At the same time, to translate from what we so-properly call 'another' language can be seen both as bringing a poem home, like a visitor, to one's own language, and as coming home afresh to that language. For a native English speaker, this is, to a degree, to 'know the place for the first time.' A poet might have many reasons for engaging in translation, as so many have done, and amongst them might be the wish to know the 'place,' English, in a fresh way. 'I like our language, as our men and coast,' George Herbert wrote (173), and his liking may well have been enhanced by his being, as we are told, 'an assiduous student of foreign languages.' He certainly knew what it was to live well on the green pick of English; and so did Vincent Buckley, some of whose relishing of that place, English, can be discerned in his few translations from Catullus. Four of the eight translations, as it happens, have travel away from home or return home as central preoccupations. I quote his version of 'Iam ver egelidos':

Spring, yes. And the first gust of warmth
Unfreezes the world and me, with soft persistence
Hushing the livid season in the sky.
It's time for travels and new sights. I'll leave
The Phrygian plains, Nicaea's wealthy heat,
And tour the fabulous cities of all Asia.

My mind is seething with it, and my feet
 Strengthen with the promised joy. Goodbye,
 My team of friends who started out with me
 From a common home, and whom the varied paths,
 Tranced places, bear in triumph home again. (*Collected* 76)

One literal translation of the Latin's first line runs, 'Now spring brings back balmy warmth': it takes a native of the place, and a zestful one, to render instead, 'Spring, yes. And the first gust of warmth...' The guild of translators being what it is, there would be those who would take issue with the last line and a half of Buckley's version— '...and whom the varied paths, / Tranced places, bear in triumph home.' Whether you call 'tranced places' translation or imitation, what a thing to get out of the English word-hoard!

To that hoard all speakers of the language have access, but that principle is greatly modified in practice, by luck and skill and personal preference. I want to end by alluding briefly to two of Buckley's poems, the first of which has to do with a kind of expatriation, and the second with a kind of repatriation, also known as coming home. English, the place, is consulted accordingly. The first poem is 'Leaving':

No matter how hard
 I have tried to leave,
 walking the distance, back and forth,
 three and four times a day,
 I can't do it; anyway,
 in its own serpentine fashion,
 it's left me already:
 the green banks finished with me,
 the birds winding down out of sight,
 the hedgehog, with its delicate
 Edwardian dancer's foot
 and eyes hunched downward.
 Like a weary body, the place
 knows when to leave. The place and the body. (*Collected* 394)

You will recognise as implicit in this, I hope, a good deal of what I have touched upon in this paper: the notion of place as yielding a story, the characterising of place via its inhabitants, the sense that place may itself be animated, the analogy between flesh and the world's flesh, each in its distinctive mortality. I would add only two things of the poem. The first is that both the title and the run of the poem may remind us that, for all of its frequent singularity, Buckley's work is typically concerned with common concerns and with the common condition, both in its bitterness and in its sweetness. And the second is that 'the hedgehog, with its delicate / Edwardian dancer's foot / and eyes hunched downward' might be the first candidate for attention in a paper which somebody might write called 'Buckley's Beasts': they would make a singular crew.

Recently, in America, I received a parcel which was badged as 'Time Sensitive Material': it proved to contain Dennis O'Driscoll's large book of interviews with Seamus Heaney. The badging, though a curiosity, was accurate enough: we are all time sensitive material, as are such accounts as can be given of us. The quasi-Chinese question, 'where are you?' finds us in places which are, whether we like it or not, variable. One of the uses of memory is to concede

that this is so, and another is to deny that that is the whole story. Hence, and finally, 'Seeing Romsey':

I see Romsey through a hole in the wind
as I used to in late autumn, in the southern gales,
just there, not vibrating with changes
but like a model that has grown to its full height.
The timber houses have roofs of painted iron,
the brick ones are lowering with warm tiles.
The tree near me is the one I climbed
fifty-three years ago. I smell *roses* on the fence
where once the whole air was brushed with cypress.
Proust's madeleine, nothing. Even the smell
of trains that haven't run here
for forty years. Smelling strong as they slow down.
Smell of the comics they brought each Saturday.
Proust's madeleine was nothing to this,
or Eliot's hyacinths and lilacs
or that great heap of blossom in Yeats' window.
Nothing to this. To the firesmell of the forge,
squeezing into the smell of burning hoof. Incense
through the voices singing *O Salutaris hostia*
that never sing Latin any more.
I smell the printer's ink, and books,
and dust that flashes when the raindrops hit it
as it takes the rain into itself. (*Collected* 452)

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